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The Astoria story, 1900-1950

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Aug. 1960.

To Anna and Wilbur-
able Christian citizens who think
and do. S. H.

The
Astoria Story

1900 to 1950



Dedicated to Our Valiant Mothers



Written By

Dagny Paulson Hinderaker

June First, 1950

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ASTORIA --- 1900 - 1950

The little village of Astoria in South Dakota was named in 1900, by the Western Town-site Co., an affiliate of the North-western railroad. It lies roughly between Big Stone Lake and Sioux Falls, almost hugging the Minnesota line. The railway brought it to life, but the rich soil and the labor of the early homesteaders gave it its growth. Those who have read Gustave Sandro's *Immigrant Trek* have some idea of what lay between 1873 and 1900 — a herculean task. They will have some idea too, of what type of settlers they were who developed this area. The first residents and builders of Astoria village were, for the most part, sons and daughters of these Norwegian pioneer farmers.

The territory between Canby and Toronto extended south to Tyler, Minnesota, forming a triangle of rich farming land somewhat cut off from the outside world. About the year 1898 there were rumors among the farmers that a railroad was coming through. This became a reality in 1900, when a locomotive crawled slowly in this direction from Tyler. The grade was finished as far as the Black Slough in the fall of 1899, the remainder in 1900.

As the site of Astoria was to be the end of the branch, it became a bee hive of activity. A turn-table and a depot were built, and the men working on these and other projects under way had to have a place to eat, sleep, and get their clothes washed. So the first hotel became a busy place. This had been built by Reinert Reinertson, a son of Rasmus Reinertson, a farmer one-half mile north. (This farm was later bought by the Rev. I. H. Hinderaker). Reinert first intended his new building for a hardware store, which explains the square front facing west, some distance north of the depot. It was later known as the H. M. Hanson house, and is believed to be the oldest in town. But soon after this the father, Rasmus Reinertson, built a rooming and boarding house on Main street—or what is now Main street. The Reinertsons and their daughters operated this busy place for many years. This house is now the home of Mrs. R. K. Rasmusen.

* A Mr. Pay was the first station agent. After him came Mr. Olsen and Tom Yates. Perhaps the best remembered are Mr. Yates and Vern Postal. Later came the courteous John West, and the colorful Mr. Taylor. I wonder if the precise and elegant Mrs. Taylor would have minded had she heard the young folks claim they had seen her in the excitement of an early morning fire wearing a hat, veil, and kid gloves? Among train men re-

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Elevator Store 12-17-50 1000

membered are the Kelson brothers and Fred Wells. Now for a long stretch of years A. W. Gilbert, just Al to everyone, has represented the North western railway here.

When Astoria was becoming a reality around 1900, the Western Townsite Co. bought forty acres of land from a Mr. Thronson who owned the farm just north of town. They also bought sixty acres from the Hetland brothers who owned the land south of what is now Main street. From this, lots were sold at a good profit. Prairie chickens, stubble and wild flowers gave way to civilization. Considering that the railroad had received every alternate section of land 50 miles deep along the main lines, as an outright gift from Uncle Sam, and also the opportunity to buy land for town lots for a small sum, one is forced to conclude that these men pioneered in a less strenuous way than the farmers had done.

With so many people gathering between the Coteau Hills and "slough lake," it became necessary to have groceries, meat, calico and overalls nearer at hand. So the first general store was opened in 1900, by Jonas Ostroot and L. Langlie of Lake Preston. The latter built the house now occupied by Mrs. Haugum, but did not live there long, as he sold his share in the store to Mr. Ostroot. The store was on the north side, just west of the present Hanson hardware store. That same year Soren Froiland built the first hardware store, next to Ostroot's. He operated this for many years. Around 1920 he bought another store at Hendricks and moved there, but continued the Astoria business up to the time of the big fire.

The Ostroots also built a good home on Main street, next to the Reinertson's boarding house. A lawn was made and trees planted. This is now the Andrew Distad home. The Ostroot children were: Gabriel, Anna, Theodore, Carl and Marie. Gabriel married a Lake Preston girl and opened a store of his own at that place.

The second general store in Astoria was built and operated by Carl O. Hanson and Gus Halverson. This store was a little farther west on the north side. In 1903, they took Bert Rogness in as a partner. A few years later they sold out to Bert, Albert Hogie, and John Hanson. The new firm added a line of implements and was known as the Astoria Mercantile Co. This firm continued in business for many years. In 1934, Bert took over the general store and John Hanson, the implement part of it. Later Bert changed to dry goods—a successful and popular store. Other Astoria merchants have been: H. E. Fjeseth, Peterson and Johnson, and Cleven and Johnson. Cellophane and plastics were

Alexander Store 12-19-80 1000

unknown then, so groceries were shipped in bulk and retailed in paper sacks. A few things came packaged, whole coffee, for instance. Ground coffee was not common yet, so housewives ground it in small coffee mills held in the lap. One remembers them sorting out "bad" coffee beans and wondering about the relative merits of the Arbuckle and Four X brands.

The first post office was in the Hanson-Halverson store, later in the Mercantile store, then in the Modtland building, and now in the pretty little red brick building originally used for a telephone "central." The first lumber yard was built in 1900, by the Botsford Co., just west of where the "north house" of the Farmer's elevator stands now. A Mr. Dinsmore was the first manager. Others were: William Thoenke, Leander Nelson from Arlington, William Johnson from Hendricks, Phil Case, Herman Nelson and Mr. McGinn. Mr. Thoenke was very popular. He was married after he came here and the family lived in the house now owned by Andrew Hagelund. Their daughter, Margaret, was the first child born in Astoria.

An early picture of the town shows both sides of the street with horses tied to hitching posts. On weekdays, it would be horses hitched to lumber wagons or "democrat wagons". On Sundays, and more so on holidays, the town would be gala with top buggies—some of them with red wheels and a smart buggy whip in a holder on the dash board. If the buggy was gleaming black and well kept, chances were that it was drawn by a well-shod and well-curried horse. Chances were further, that it was owned by a young man who took his girl riding in it. A young man's prosperity was often judged by his "rig"—the red, white and blue celluloid rings in the harness, the yellow tasseled fly nets on the horse, and the fancy lap robe or "duster" in the buggy. The democrat wagon, and later the surrey, were used by men with families.

Alfred Froiland was much in demand as the "livery man" in the early days. The first livery stable was built north of the present hardware store, but later was moved to a lot east and north of the depot. Alfred came here from the farm in 1900(and was in the livery business for many years. Before the time of the automobile and for many years afterward, he took salesmen and other travelers far and wide. A good many people came here on the train (we had two a day then), and hired a livery to take them to Toronto, and the other way around. Helmer Jorstad, a darkeyed young man with a sense of humor, worked for Alfred for a while. Speaking of humor, Alfred's booming voice and hearty laugh were not gloomy either. Anton Reinertson was also

an early livery man.

Carpenters were busy people here for many years. Haldor Lokken did some building including the parsonage. Mr. Kyllingstad of Chicago built the house now owned by Andrew Hage-lund. The house now occupied by the Mickelsons was built for Thomas Lovaas. Erick Megard, Fish Lake pioneer, moved into a new house here in 1907. (This house was destroyed by fire in 1929. A new house was built by the Bakken brothers.) The town was not much more than a half dozen years old when the Storry carpenters came. The brothers, Arnt and Ole, and their cousin, Ole J. Storry, had learned carpentering and cabinet making, including the finest parquetry work, in Norway. These men did more building here than any other carpenters. Ole J. has also done considerable real estate business through the years. Arnt's brother, Ole, did not remain here long, but the two cousins have brought up their gifted families here, and always taken an active part in community affairs.

Grain elevators were built in 1900 also, and took care of that year's crop. The first two were built by Minnesota firms. The first manager of the Western elevator was Mr. Mortenson of Canby, and a Mr. Fugledale of the Sleepy Eye house. This is the present "south house" of the Farmer's elevator. Thomas Lovaas, Fred Olsen of Canby, and Hoseas Hinderaker were also managers at the "Western". Carl Hanson, Ole Solem, and C. B. Hanson were associated with the Sleepy Eye house. In 1911 this was sold to the Farmer's Cooperative. The Western elevator was sold around 1912 to George P. Sexauer. The Farmer's Cooperative Elevator was organized in 1900 also, and a building went up where Cherry Nelson's filling station is now. The first directors were C. J. Peterson, H. P. Moen, Hans Thompson, and E. E. Distad, Andrew's father. Nels Lovaas was the chairman at the organizational meeting. The farmers moved their elevator closer to the railroad track as soon as they could secure a lot. They hired John W. Arctander of Minneapolis as their attorney, and eventually, the Botsford Lumber Company leased them a site on the north side, where the "north house" now stands. (This first building was destroyed by fire in 1916.) When the cooperative opened for business in 1901, Andrew Distad was the first manager. Later came O. C. Hauger, Ole Solem, Carl Nelson and Hoseas Hinderaker. The first three had attended school at Sioux Falls, Brookings and Canton. Hoseas, then a young man of 23, and a graduate of the Canby high school, had come here in 1906 to buy grain for the Western Elevator Company. Two years later he began his long service at the Farmer's. Excepting for the

years 1920 - 1924, he worked there continuously for 38 years. As business began to take in a large territory, a "second" man was hired. The best remembered of these is generous, sociable George Hjelm, a native of Stavanger, Norway. At this writing, the manager at the Farmer's is Randolph Anderson, and Ole Storry is his assistant. For the first time a stenographer is employed there —Evangeline Johnson.

Managers came and went at Sexauers. One of the most successful was Albert Chester from Toronto. In later years, Oscar Erickson from Arlington, and Norman Bergheim from Oldham, are recalled. This elevator was sold in 1944, to Hoseas Hinderaker.

The first blacksmith was S. P. Hanson. It took a strong back to shoe the well-fed and often high-spirited horses of that time. Adolph Reinertson, Henry Digre, and Andrew Larson were also early day blacksmiths. Somewhat later, Lars Reinertson, and a Mr. Peglar. Oscar Sand was here for many years, and then, Ingvald Modtland.

Ole Ronning was the first barber. He had his chair in the Froiland hardware store, and was succeeded by Ingeman Megard, who later sold out to John Schiefelbein of Clear Lake. In the fall of 1915 Elmer Hanson became the village barber, but three years later he went into the hardware business, and Nathan Hover of Toronto succeeded him as barber. Mr. Hover continued here in business and various offices of trust until his untimely death in 1943.

Some of the farmers had lived here nearly thirty years when the town was started. They were pleased when free mail delivery came in 1901. Gus Halverson completed a term of country school before taking over his duties as mail carrier. Mr. Palmer, of White, was the mailman on Route 2 for a short time, then Herbert Hanson for a long period, and later, Helmer Jorstad. Now Peter Budahl has rounded out 32 years in government service. He was recently honored by postmaster, patrons, and other friends at a reception at his home.

The only way farmers could market their stock before the trucking era was by railroad. The railway company provided stock yards near the track, and the buyer drove from farm to farm, soliciting cattle or hogs. Mr. Lindskog of Hendricks was the first buyer here. Later, Ole Storry, Thos. Lovaas, and others, shipped stock. These yards seemed also to be a rendezvous for hoboes. They would sometimes come to the homes for a hand-out, but never did any harm.

A farmer's cooperative creamery was built in 1907, where Elmer Bakke recently built his shop. A Mr. Ridgway was the

first buttermaker. Later came Chris Rogness, Mr. Rishoi, Mr. Hanlon, Nicolai Volstad, Ben Ruttum, Mr. Rawson, Mr. Kreuger, and Carl Skogstad of Flandreau. The Volstads built a house here and later sold it to Robert Evenson. Perhaps the location of the creamery was not good; also it became increasingly difficult to secure good buttermakers. The creamery eventually was closed, and the building and equipment sold.

A feed mill was set up here in 1908. This had been bought from H. P. Mortenson of Toronto. J. A. Johnson, also of Toronto, operated the mill and a generator for electric lights. These were used mainly in business places. It was not till 1920 that electric lights became general in the homes. Power then was secured from Canby which it still is. The first appliance was the flat-iron. Kerosene stoves were popular in the summer time, but the coal and wood range was used the most. The early feed mill and generator stood where the Nelson filling station is now. The Johnson family moved here in 1909. They subsequently operated a hotel.

The first meat market was built and operated by H. M. Hanson, from Milan, Minn. This too, was on the north side of the street. He also opened a restaurant next to his meat market. The Hanson daughters, especially Hilma, kept this little eating place clean and inviting for many years. When the business did not keep him at home Mr. Hanson was a familiar figure over a large territory as a land agent. His young son, Herbert, made trips into the country selling meat from a meat wagon. The Hansons purchased the house built by Reinert Reinertson, and lived there for a long time. It is still the only building down town besides the depot, that faces west.

Other "butchers" at Astoria have been The Brests, who rented from H. M. Hanson, Thos. Lovaas, Theodore Roseland, Rudolph Erickson, Arnold Lovre, and the Goodwin Strands. Former cafe people include the Hansons, the Andrew Larsons, the O. P. Solems, the Arvid Stroms, the Millard Stroms, the Gredvigs, and the Terrys. There have been others here for brief periods.

The Astoria State Bank had been opened in 1902, with Oliver C. Hauger, also a former teacher, as cashier. The bank was built on the "northeast" corner lot, where the E. O. Hanson hardware store now stands. Mr. Hauger also served the community as choir and band director for many years. A little later, Ben Solem, now state auditor, joined Mr. Hauger in the bank. The Solems lived just north of the parsonage for a short time, but moved into a new house they built across from the church. Mrs. Ed Hogie lives there now and enjoys the beautiful trees planted by the Solems.

The same may be said of Mrs. Arneson, who lives where the Haugers lived. In the first years of the bank, Bert Rogness' youngest brother, Gilbert, was attending country school, and went on to Red Wing Seminary and business college. Eventually he also went to work in the bank. Girls employed in the bank included Anna Trooien, Julia Schmidkunz, and Anna Benson. The business was moved across the street into a new brick building in 1918. John Rogness of Hendricks became the cashier in 1922. The Rogness family lived first in the Engelstad house, and later, in the house built by Oscar Ovall and now occupied by the Randolph Andersons. The Astoria bank however was a casualty in the general demise that swept the country before the great stock market crash in New York in 1929.

The first veterinarian here was Robert K. Rasmussen, who enjoyed the confidence of all. As an only son he took over the homestead for a number of years. During this time, Paul Foster V. S. of New York state, practised here. When Dr. Rasmussen resumed his practice, the family moved to town. But in the midst of a busy career he was stricken by a heart ailment, and died in 1937.

Astoria was a town of young people in the 1900's. We are grateful to Albert Hogie, and other early camera fans. The pictures they took will be valued more and more as the years go by. Before he came to town, Albert was the manager of a lumber yard at Volga. When he took pictures, he also finished them himself. "Meeting the train" was a part of the recreation in all small towns at that time. There was much banter, fun, and playing of practical jokes. Stunts were carried out all along Main street, and in the Reinertson boarding house. — In 1914 the few dailies in town carried headlines about Germans marching through Belgium. But it all seemed far away, then.

Present day young folks have sometimes asked: "Was there much excitement—like a frontier town, you know?" Well, no. There was great activity—many people coming and going. As said before, there were tricks and practical jokes. One remembers for instance, the morning Herb Hanson as mail carrier, entered his mail sorting "stall" in the post-office and found hay and oats there. There were rumors of sensational happenings at times, but these were for the most part, inventions of people who lacked color in their own lives . . . until the Brests came! The Brests had rented the meat market, and James Jindra, a bright young fellow, lately from Poland, worked for them. Jim wisely put in some time attending school here. As for the Brests, their tenure was brief. It seemed they had hardly been here long

enough to have planned so much, when we awoke one morning to find that Mr. B. (and he didn't look romantic either) had eloped with a girl of his choice—not a local product. Mrs. Brest promptly followed suit by eloping with a young fellow from a neighboring town. This startling melodrama was described in the Clear Lake Courier under the heading "Brest to Brest".

For some years, people went into the country both to school and to church. In 1909 a Lutheran church was built here by the Singaas country congregation, and the Rev. Ekse conducted services up to 1917. This church was also open to other local people who gathered for informal worship somewhat like the prayer meetings held in some of the homes. By this time many retired farmers were living in town, and lay men from this group led these gatherings, using the Norwegian language.

Astoria grew and prospered. Around 1910 business was good, more homes were built, and the little country school-house one-half mile north and one-half mile east, had been moved into town. Dr. Jenson of Hendricks, very well liked, was a frequent visitor, indicating that new citizens were arriving, and the school growing. (Midwives were called upon less than formerly. Mrs. Rasmus Reinertson and others had served in this capacity.) Before long a two-room school building took the place of the old one—inadequate again after being enlarged once. The first teacher was Ida Iverson of Brookings. Miss Iverson was always influential in the community, and is still with us as Mrs. Albert Hogie. She was also the superintendent of the Sunday School for many years, and held other offices of trust. Other early teachers were Marie Ostrout, Clara Wrolstad, a niece of Mr. Hauger, Clara Lovas, and Anna Larsen of Hendricks, a sister of Mrs. West.

Two sisters, Dagny and Signe Paulson of Brandt, came to teach the nine grades in the fall of 1914. A little fellow, then in the grades, is now a nationally known minister, and the author of several books—Alvin Rogness, D. D. Meanwhile, Oscar C. Hanson, D. D. was growing up on a nearby farm. One of the memories of that mild autumn is the playing of basketball in Astoria for the first time. Clarence Megard, David Peterson, Roosevelt Distad and others made an outdoor court, and the game was much enjoyed by both boys and girls. Older young people often made use of the court on Sunday afternoons. The above mentioned teachers became Astoria housewives in 1916. The writer of this history, Mrs. Hinderaker is still here. The other, Mrs. Herbert Hanson, died at the age of 32.

Weddings were frequent in the early years. Many were cele-

brated on nearby farms, some in town, and some at a distance. John Hanson was one of the few who were married when they came to town in the early 1900's. His wife was Bertha Hogie, and they made their home in the Langlie house until they built a home on Main street in 1914. Carl Hanson married Mary Reinertson. (Her cousin, Marie Reinertson never married, which was fortunate for her many nieces and nephews, to whom she gave a lifetime of unselfish devotion. These are now able professional people, farmers, and business men). Gus Halverson married Marie Distad; Andrew Distad - Olava Froiland; Ole Solem - Carrie Ruttum; Bert Rogness - Mina Engelstad; Alfred Froiland - Kitty Thompson; Arnt Storry - Johanna Solem (church organist); William Johnson - Clara Landmark; Oliver Hauger - Hulda Strom; Soren Froiland - Emma Pearson of Madison, Minn.; Albert Hogie - Ida Iverson of Brookings; Theodore Ostroot - Hanna Quail of Brookings; Robert Rasmussen - Gordy Lovaas; Ben Solem - Bertha Ruttum (they lived in a cottage built by Ole Solem. Albert Hogie and Arthur Jorstads lived there later, but this house was subsequently sold and moved to a farm.) Elmer Hanson married Gena Rogness, a good musician; Thomas Lovaas - Mabel Kyllingstad of Chicago; Theodore Hinderaker - Clara G. Hanson, also a good musician; David Lovaas - Emma Hogie, a nurse; they went to Madagascar as missionaries, and survived a terrible shipwreck. It was after the first World War had begun in Europe, and their steamship, the City of Athens, struck a mine off the east coast of Africa. Ole Storry married Betsy Ruttum and built a home on Main street. Dr. Foster married Thea Hogie; Albert Chester - Evangeline Walberg; Peter Budahl - Linnie Johnson; Gilbert Rogness - Anna Trooien.

All of these established good homes with families—a few of them, large families. Their children, grown up together with the children of citizens who moved here later, comprise the splendid second generation of Astoria. Practically without exception, they have a high school education; many, perhaps one-half of them, are college graduates. Quite a number of them have gone beyond that, and had training in special fields.

Of the families who moved in from the farms, the A. T. Ruttum family is typical. Their seven children have grown up here, been well educated, and the four eldest are good citizens in distant cities. Mrs. Ruttum, nee Elsie Shewell, is a descendant of John Brown of Harper's Ferry. Mr. Ruttum is a district manager for a stock mineral firm, and has two agents in the locality. He is always called "A. T." to distinguish him from his cousin Anton J.

From 1910 on, many of the pioneer farmers near Astoria began to retire and build large homes in town. At this time, Arnt Storry did most of the building. More trees, especially evergreens and fruit trees were planted. "Painter" Peterson who built and occupied the Jacobsen house, took a great interest in beautification. How grateful we are now to all those who planted trees! Lawns, flower beds, and vegetable gardens were made where stubble and wild roses had been before. Long before this however the Ostroot porch had been vine-covered, and yellow roses blooming in the yard.

No history of Astoria would be complete without mention of the "dog trial." This case was heard in the school-house about the year 1912. Several valuable dogs had been poisoned and the owner sued for damages. The inexperience of nearly everyone concerned created a situation that did not escape the comical. Mr. Edwards of Hendricks and W. W. Knight of Clear Lake were the attorneys. Hoseas Hinderaker happened to be justice of the peace at the time, so he acted as judge. Ben Solem was the foreman of the jury, and Theodore Ostroot acted as interpreter for the Hetland brothers who spoke only Norwegian. All these were young men at the time.

When the Deuel Co. Telephone Co. was organized, with C. J. Peterson, Fish Lake farmer, as president, there was much interest and much work to be done. The first "central" was installed about the year 1905 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gus Halverson who had bought the Thos. Lovaas house. Mrs. Halverson was the first "hello girl" and Esther Peterson, a daughter of John "Painter" Peterson, was her assistant. C. N. Trooien was the "line man" and traveled a great deal in one of the early car models. He had a real talent for mechanics and was called upon later to do the work of an electrician. C. M. Foss of Hendricks, eventually bought the telephone system, but in the thirties, a new owner moved the "central" to Hendricks.

Dentists made regular visits to Astoria when it was young. Dr. Brosius, Dr. Larson, Dr. Berg, and others had a chair in the Johnson Hotel, on certain days. This hotel was located where the Kurtenbach garage has recently been built. It was a pleasant place, known for good food, clean rooms, and a homelike atmosphere. The office and the dining room were often full of young men, and there was much kidding and laughter.

Astoria has always been interested in music. Long before the radio came, there were choir and band concerts, chautauquas, and in between, clear notes from Elmer's violin or Gilbert's cornet. Many local families loved music, and their children dis-

tinguished themselves in large musical circles later. The writer is tempted here to go into individual achievements. They are interesting—a credit to their homes and their community—but most of all to themselves. Verona Rogness, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Bert Rogness, may be taken as an example. Her opportunities were no greater than those of the average small town girl. But she had from childhood, an ambition to excel in music, made good use of her time and what instruction she could get here which was by no means extensive. So we see her, after college, studying under Countess Morstzyn and at the Juillard school in New York. She taught piano in a girls' school in the East and is now on the music faculty of Augustana College.

A beautiful custom which has been followed by local young people almost from the beginning is the annual Christmas caroling. They meet at the church or the parsonage, form into groups, and go to every home in town to sing, after which someone invites them for Christmas morning breakfast. The interest and appreciation of their elders, no doubt helped those who have succeeded elsewhere. There was a time when we had a small but good orchestra in town also, under the leadership of John Rogness, now of Madison. Perhaps music has had something to do with the fact that the church has been a center for young people home on vacations. The use of the violin and band instruments in Sunday School and church programs was more general a few years ago than it is now. The Lovseth young people, too, have given us much fine music. Opal especially, has worked hard—for one must work hard to take care of the church music, teach in the grades, and keep house in the parsonage, all at the same time.

Our high school has had fine success down through the years. We recall certain periods when there was a wealth of real talent in music, as well as in dramatics and speech. Superior ratings were attained at regional contests. Certain teachers are naturally thought of in this connection. What listener would not like to thrill again to Miss Hilmoe's group singing Christiansen's "Fallen Snow", or the difficult five-part "Exaltation"? And it was Gudrun, too, who gave us that splendid performance of the high school chorus in the operetta, "Oh Doctor". For a number of years, we also had a good school band, under the direction of Einar Reinertson. In recent years, Mrs. Fjellestad, Mr. Reuter, and Miss Lovseth have done fine work with music. The grades, too, have presented good operettas and other programs, and the high school recently brought home six superior ratings out of nine entries in the regional contest at Milbank.

WORLD WAR I

The years 1917 and '18 were sad and difficult years. Many of our young men marched off to war. We shared with other communities the sad experience that they did not all come back. The Engen and Bakken families were bereaved. Later the returned soldiers named their Legion post the Bakken-Engen Post. This group has always been a great asset to our community.

A Red Cross unit was organized during the war, and a great deal of sewing and knitting was done by the women. One recalls tearing old linen tablecloths into strips, pressing them with a hot iron, and rolling them for bandages. While the young soldiers were in camp or in action in Europe, a very serious influenza epidemic occurred. It was at its height in this country in 1917 and '18. There were many deaths, both locally and in the camps. This may have been due to some extent, to the shortage of doctors, nurses, and equipment, and to the unforeseen severity of the disease.

The Rev. K. G. Hatlen, serving country congregations, but living in town, organized the village church (Bethany) in 1918. The Rev. Hinderaker, retired pioneer pastor, was also a moving spirit. With his snow-white hair, vandyke beard, neat serge suit, and stiff "bosom" shirt, he was an incongruous figure in the hustle and bustle of the town. The newly organized congregation bought the church built here by the Singaas people, and in 1918, the Rev. P. O. Lovseth of Reeder, N. Dak., was called. He came the following year, and is still with us, after serving kindly and faithfully these many years. Mrs. Lovseth was deeply mourned when she died in 1944. Two of their sons are pastors in neighboring states.

We owe a great debt also to earlier spiritual leaders—various lay men, the Reverends Ekse, Hinderaker, and Hinderlie. And, speaking especially to those who were the young people of the pre-war period, what name plays upon the heartstrings like that of Rev. Hatlen? We also wish to pay tribute to pioneer parents. They were not the type who thought only of land and profit—they sacrificed for the children and the community, set a high standard for living, and made an honest effort to reach it.

Astoria was incorporated as a village in 1917, by order of the county commissioners. John Hanson, Carl Nelson, and John Melby were the first supervisors; Nicolai Volstad, clerk, Theodore Ostroot, treasurer; Hoseas Hinderaker, assessor; Arnt Storry, marshal; O. C. Hauger, justice of the peace. The 1950

officers are Elmer Hanson, Cherry Nelson, Vernon Dorn; Ole Storry, clerk; A. J. Hogie, treasurer, A. J. Rutlum, assessor, and Kris Grimli, constable and caretaker.

The school election of 1920 was an exciting one. The following year the attractive brick high school was built. Soren Froiland's nice home and yard was just west of the school building. The Froilands moved the house to Hendricks and eventually the school district secured this lovely area and added it to the school grounds. The trees and shrubs are there because the Froilands planted them in the early 1900's.

The first high school superintendent was S. G. Froiland of Dawson, Minn. He came almost directly from European battlefields where he had been a "runner". He brought messages to officers from their superiors while the battles raged. Eventually a bullet struck him which he carries in his back to this day. Mr. Froiland gave the high school a splendid start. Nothing really worth while is gained without sacrifice on the part of parents. The extremely hard times that followed the building in Independent School-District No. 34 was a tragic trial to those who bore the burden.

E. G. Larson of Garretson succeeded Mr. Froiland as superintendent. After him came Leif Fjellestad, a star athlete at Augustana College. The Fjellestads, now a family of five, are still with us. A fine high school has been built up here, and the Fjellestads have entered whole-heartedly into community life. Ole Anderson has done a fine job as engineer and caretaker. Many excellent teachers come to mind.

When the automobile had replaced the horse, the garage and the mechanic became a necessity like the filling station. Albert Mathison from Toronto was a garage man here for a number of years. The Mathisons lived in the house on east Main street built by John Fossen. The Bregel family lived there later, as did the J. A. Johnsons, the Chesters, the Chris Johnsons, and now the Thos. Fishers.

A good harness and shoe repair shop was a real convenience here for many years. John Bakken, Sr., now of Rapid City, was the proprietor, and the shop was in the post-office building. The Bakkens bought and improved the Megard place, and lived there for some time. Their beautiful yard was often a meeting place for various organizations. Andrew Bakken was our postmaster for a long time, having succeeded C. N. Trooien.

In December 1923 the Astoria business section suffered a disastrous fire. All the buildings on the north side in the main

block burned to the ground excepting the hotel and the post-office which is now the Burson garage. Those destroyed included the old bank building which was E. O. Hanson's hardware store, the Ostroot store, Soren Froiland's hardware store, the meat market, the old Hanson cafe building, housing Dr. Rasmussen's office and supplies, also the Mercantile store and the O. P. Solem cafe. The presence of a scarlet fever epidemic added to the horrors of the night when some families were advised to leave their homes.

It was a stunning blow indeed. But people did not just sit down and wring their hands. In spite of the fact that the years following the fire were "depression" years, new ventures were begun and some building done. A farmer, Joachim Modtland, built two buildings east from the hotel. Elmer Hanson had already built a fine new brick structure, and started a new hardware store. (About three years later Elmer's young wife died. With admirable courage and patience, the widower kept the home intact, brought up and educated the five small children, and did his part in church and community besides.) In 1930 Gilbert Rogness who had been employed in the bank, both before he went into the service and afterward, built the first filling station and operated it for many years. In 1933, A. J. Ruttum moved here from Hendricks and made great changes in the garage building he had bought. This is the handsome red brick building constructed on the southeast corner" in 1919 by Ole O. Solem of Clear Lake. Mr. Ruttum opened a modern creamery, and was very successful, after the drouth years had been endured. The cups he won in state and national contests were good publicity for this part of South Dakota.

A second filling station was built in 1936 by Everett Nelson and Cherry Nelson of Toronto. Everett had grown up here, and is not related to Cherry. The father, Ed. Nelson, was an invalid for many years before his death. The children no longer live here, but have done well in other communities. Several live in Minneapolis, including Everett, as he sold his interest in the station to Cherry. An attractive feature of this station is the stone chimney built by the owner. Gilbert Rogness sold his oil station to Victor Johnson in 1945. There was a time when there were bulk stations in town too. H. M. Hanson sold the first bulk oil in the twenties, and Walter Torgerson and Frank Bregel from Fairfax, Minn. delivered oil from Standard tanks set up south of the present Hinderaker elevator.

CONVENTIONS

Through the years we have had some large gatherings, including several conventions. The Namdal lag in the summer of 1928 brought the largest crowd ever assembled in our town. This was commonly called the "Hilsen lag" because it was arranged by Einar Hilsen, then a resident of Astoria. He was a former newspaper man and had been a representative of Norway at Norwegian-American affairs in this country. It was also interesting that his father had been a member of the Norwegian parliament. The Hilsen family lived here for several years, having bought the Megard house, which they called "Jefferson House."

The lag (or lodge as some incorrectly called it) also brought first class talent to town. Congressman O. J. Kvale of Benson, Minn., an idealistic statesman, was the main speaker on the Fourth of July. He had a dynamic and magnetic personality that is not soon forgotten. Probably not many of us understood the full significance of the trends he described that day, but we have seen the fruits of dollar politics since. Another outstanding number on the program was the performance of the nationally known "Leikaring" of Minneapolis. This group of about 24 folk dancers performed in Norwegian national costumes, often singing to their own games, in a truly artistic and beautiful way. The folk dances were of historic interest too, because they had grown up among Norwegian peasants and many of them ages old. All the "lag" programs were free and open to the public.

Meals were served and sold in the school gymnasium by volunteer women. Mrs. Hilsen and Mrs. Bakken deserve mention here. Mrs. A. W. Gilbert, too, is remembered as gracious and helpful at this time. Much of the food had been ordered from Norway by the Hilsens and was delicious. People came from far and near to get a taste of caviar, shrimp, flat bread, and lingon berries.

The seats and the platform for the programs were built on the vacant lot now owned by Hoseas Hinderaker, west and north of the schoolhouse. Music, speaking, visiting, and sale of confections went on here for three days — festive, delightful days, not the least so to children. We may remind ourselves that this was 1928. It was claimed by reliable persons that there were 2500 people here on July Fourth. Many well-known persons of Norwegian descent attended this lag and seemed to enjoy the country. All in all, it was an affair such as no small town could afford to put on on its own. The Hilsens later moved to Minneapolis.

Mrs. Hilsen is now a recognized poet in Minnesota.

Another successful convention was the Luther League gathering in 1931. This was held in a large tent on the church grounds. Dr. N. M. Ylvisaker, now in Germany in Lutheran Action work, was the main speaker on Sunday. His young son, then in high school had outstanding dramatic talent, and is now the well-known Eric Rolfe. At the last session of the convention there was a massed choir concert directed by the Rev. Sigurd Moe of Brandt. The usual "stands" and merry making by children and grown ups went on in the open air between sessions.

THE DROUTH

The thirties were difficult years because of the drouth and the dust storms. It was the time of W. P. A. and other government projects after they were set in motion. It has been the fashion to wisecrack about W. P. A., but no one seeing those men go out to their road work at dawn in thirty below weather, can agree that it was all easy. Nor was it easy for men who knew they could do better things, to work all day with pick and shovel. Among projects for women was a dormitory for young people who came in from the farms to attend high school. Various homes served as dormitories: The Carl Nelson, Bennie Froiland, Mrs. Henry Hanson, and Chris Johnson homes. 1936 was a red letter year in Astoria history, as our water system was then completed by local workmen. What seems like a small sum now, \$2500.00 was guaranteed by the village, and the rest of the cost taken care of by the New Deal. No better project could have been chosen, and every year that goes by makes us increasingly appreciative. The pure spring water coming out of the hills is a constant joy. Kris Grimli has gone up to the pump in the hill every day, calm or storm, and deserves praise.

There is much thoughtless talk and writing in the newspapers nowadays about people being spoiled. But the "grass roots" have always taken "what comes". At a time when big business men in cities were jumping out of windows because they no longer could buy mink coats, small business men and farmers were "taking it". Most of them looked beyond it all, and it was still "O. K." and "It can't last forever" when asked about their luck.

Mothers made heroic efforts to get meals on the table for growing children, especially in 1934 and '35 when even green

weeds were scarce. This time not even the hardest work could solve the problem. Clothing could be made over while the children slept, but where was the food coming from? Gardens had dried up, there were almost no crops and very few jobs. The nearby farm wives were hardly better off—cows don't milk when the pasture is brown. Somehow most of the children grew up without feeling too much of the insecurity, and eventually it rained again. The lilacs bloomed and the meadow larks appeared on their high perches, singing their golden songs of hope.

THE LANDSCAPE

The Coteau Hills—or that part of them roughing it just west of town, are now generally called the "German Hills". Young people sometimes ask the reason for this name. It was not, in the beginning, German, but Gjermund. A retired sailor, Gjermund Herik, once lived on the hillside where Will Jorstad lives now. Herik came here when he was too old to continue in the Norwegian merchant marine where he had spent his entire life. It must have been a drastic change from the high seas. There is a legend that his wife liked to dress in white and made white house dresses to wear where slacks would have been worn by modern women. It was said that as she grew older she became queer, and described in Stavanger dialect how she saw little "hill men" peeking over the brow of the hill, and how one of them aimed a tiny arrow at her and hit his mark. She called attention to a little bruise on her forehead to prove this. Fortunately, she seemed to feel quite at home with the brownies.

In the horse and buggy days and for many years thereafter, the winding road west was the road to Toronto—that is, the traveled road. Off this road to the north, at the peak of the hill, there is quite a drop-off. There has been a story about this too—a treasure was said to be buried in the almost inaccessible spot at the bottom. The hills have always been a favorite outlook for young people on picnics and school children on hikes. The distant goal would usually be the lovely unspoiled "Springs" about a mile south. But part of the outing was always looking for Indian arrows, and viewing Astoria and the lakes from the highest hill. The Springs—what memories the name invites—school picnics, camping parties, botanizers, lovers,—now and then, mothers, seeking the lush green during the dry years. And what a place to hunt pussy willows! Nowadays airplanes look down also on this

secluded spot—and the tiny star flowers look up.

Bordering Astoria on the east we have what is commonly called the Slough. It deserves a better name than that. Now when there is little or no water in it, it resembles a natural amphitheater—all green with a fringe of straight trees against the far side, and the nearer steep slopes, blue with pasque flowers in the spring. Older people remember it when it was full of water, with ducks, pelicans, and other waterfowl—yes, fish too—and often good skating in the wintertime. If this pretty lake bottom were left undisturbed, it would be an ideal game refuge—a cover for wild life of many kinds. What a place for an early morning walk!

“In the morning very early,
That’s the time I love to go
Barefoot where the fern grows curly
And grass is cool between each toe.”

No one who had the good fortune to grow up at Astoria, lacks memories of Oak Lake. It lies less than two miles south among the hills and is a very pretty lake. Girls have tried to paint pictures of it, and many boys have seen the sunrise colors and the morning star from their “pup tents”. Harlan Engelstad, John Rogness, jr., Allen Ahre, Philip Hinderaker, Perry Rogness, Coon Hanson, and Clarence Johnson could tell you about camping—and blisters.

Though recreational facilities and opportunities in a small town leave much to be desired, there have been wholesome and pleasant activities. Parties, picnics, and home talent plays are recalled. Alf Larsen, now of Minneapolis, is remembered for his promotion of recreation, especially skiing. It is to be hoped that it will be possible for small towns to place more emphasis on the cultural side of life also, so that talents and tastes may be further developed after high school. Our auditorium should help in that there will be a suitable place for both men and women to meet together and discuss anything from agriculture to politics and the atomic age.

Astoria observed her fortieth anniversary in 1940, with a good parade and an outdoor program. Several organizations and business men had floats, Pete Sorenson brought his 1904 Buick, still in excellent condition, and a very early model of a threshing rig was brought in. Judge Knight of Brookings gave the address of the day, and a brief history was read by Mrs. Hoseas Hinderaker. A number of former residents and friends came to spend the day.

In the history written for 1940, one paragraph reads “As to

organizations, we have almost too many to mention— church school, Legion, Legion Auxiliary, 4-H club, Boy Scouts, and a Women's Extension Club." The same is true now, although we regret that at present there is no Scout troop. The firemen should have been mentioned. They have met down through the years, put on benefits, and done their part well in emergencies. There is now also, an active Commercial Club.

A whole chapter, many chapters, could be written about the activities of the women in building up the community. They have led many times, both with the mind and with the hoe. There has been good cooperation, as witness the building of the church a few years ago, and now the new auditorium. Many local improvements can be traced to the Legion Auxiliary. The Auxiliary park is a constant reminder of their interest in beautification. Practically every citizen is to be commended for the upkeep of his own home and yard. After all, the town is what the people make it. The many trees remind us that we too, may plant—we too, may do things for those who come after us.

"A tree that may in summer wear

A nest of robins in her hair."

In this history I shall touch only briefly upon the great sorrows that have come to us. There are families who have lost dear ones—many of the first residents are gone, and some very promising young people have been mourned. We shall never forget the passing of Lucille Hover and Helen Hanson. In homes where parents have been called it has been noteworthy to see how the remaining members have kept up family relationships and often the home itself.

WORLD WAR II AND THE PRESENT

War is such a wide and tragic subject that the writer fears any brief mention of this last terrible struggle will violate the reader's sense of proportion. However our contemporaries know that the tension, pain, and sorrow of it was the same here as in other communities, and we shall leave it to the imagination of younger readers. May they be "impractical" enough to rise up and outlaw war with all its ungodly tools. I believe that among the common people the world over there is a constant prayer for peace.

The second world war demanded even more of us than the

first. This time practically all our young men were called into the service. Victor Johnson was the first to go. He enlisted and served throughout the war in the Pacific theatre. Burnis Rogness served in North Africa and in Europe as a chaplain, and was awarded the silver star. Several other local boys received medals for bravery. Aaron Rogness was severely wounded. Three, Orville Peterson, Emmons Sand, and Sherman Ames died on foreign battlefields.

We have seen the war end after a manner, and our boys come back to us. They have adjusted themselves to civilian life in a way that we can respect. Many have continued their education, thanks to the G. I. Bill. Though relatively few of the younger people have settled down here, most of them come back often and seem to think of Astoria as "home."

As a business town, Astoria is not particularly favored in a geographical way, nor do we have a paved highway within many miles. So the success of ventures here may be laid very largely to the people themselves. We think of outstanding business men who were big enough to think of the town as a whole, rather than individual gain. We think for instance of that hearty pioneer, John Hanson, whose career was cut short by illness and death in 1937. (Ten years later his widow was suddenly taken away from her large family. They rest in the Bethlehem cemetery.) And who can think of Astoria without thinking of Bert Rogness and the fine leadership he supplied in business, community and church affairs? Hearts were heavy over a large area in 1948 when Bert followed his lovely wife into the eternal mansions.

There are not so many left of the early citizens, locally at least. Alfred Froiland, Andrew Distad and his good wife, the Albert Hogies, Hoseas Hinderaker, Ole Storry, Mrs. Peter Budahl, and Elmer Hanson. The Ostroot children live in North Dakota, California, and Lake Preston. The Thoemkes live in Omaha, the Carl Hansons at Hendricks, and the Gus Halversons at Clear Lake. The Ole Solems live at Madison, Minn., Thos. Lovaas in California, Ingeman Megard at Toronto, Ben Solems at Brookings, and Rev. Hatlen at Paullina, Iowa. Mrs. O. C. Hauger is in North Dakota with her daughter, Nora Hauger Sabe, and Mrs. Soren Froiland lives in Minneapolis. Mrs. H. M. Hanson and Herbert live in Watertown, and Arney Johnson who came here as a boy, is a train man on the Northwestern and makes his home at Tracy, Minn.

NEW CITIZENS AND A LOOK AT "DOWN TOWN"

Astoria has made great strides since 1940. Handsome trees have grown up where the fire once raged, many building have gone up and others have been improved. Elmer Bakke has constructed a shop on the old creamery site. Floyd Hicks has shown great enterprise. The John Deere establishment on the southwest corner, employing several men and a stenographer, Delores Anderson, would be a credit to a much larger town. Mrs. A. W. Gilbert has a little drug store in one part of Mr. Gilbert's building, and Gene Trooien has a popular cafe in the same building. This was operated a short time by Mr. and Mrs. Grant Lightner. Milton Rogness succeeded his father in the dry goods store. He does architectural planning and drawing on the side, both for local people and firms at a distance. Vernon Dorn from Hendricks, also a young man, owns the meat market and grocery next door. Albert Johnson has an up-to-date Gamble store, and Peder Kosberg of Hendricks bought the creamery. One end of this building has been converted into a blacksmith shop for Goodwin Sand, an able blacksmith, as his father was before him.

Crossing the street east, we have the Victor Johnson filling station. Some years ago the versatile and enterprising Gilbert Rogness moved the old lumber yard building to its present location next to the service station. The building was improved and enlarged, and Gilbert went into the lumber business. Charley Johnson built a fine Produce building next, and then we have Pete's place. If you see a big red truck coming down the street, it will be Bennett Strand's. On the north side, Oscar Westgard is the postmaster, and in the attractive cream-colored brick building west, is Otterdahl's grocery, meat market, and locker system. A few steps north is the fire hall where elections are also held. Many a fateful ballot is marked while the fire engine looks indifferent. Going back to Main street, Hanson's Hardware, and the new auditorium make a good beginning in the block. Burson's garage, Lawrence "Kelly" Dokken's barber shop, and the Martinson cafe come next. Here June and Betty wait on customers and sell delicacies as the Terry girls did before them. Radio servicing has been done by the E. O. Hanson boys, Weldon Hogie and Philip Hinderaker. Weldon has also done fine camera work. The first airplanes were owned by Andrew Hagelund and Glen Hover. Dr. Hover is our busy veterinarian. He is another of our

young people who realized his childhood ambition, and we are glad to say, settled down here.

The first television set in Deuel County, and perhaps in a much larger area, was brought here in 1949 by Weldon Hogie, employed in TV at WTCN, Minneapolis, and set up in the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Hogie. The reception has been better than they had hoped and the televising of sports has been especially enjoyed.

Among new buildings since our fortieth anniversary are several homes. Some have come back and built in Astoria after living in other towns,—Tim Donahue for instance. Tim was a produce buyer here for many years, and is remembered for his generosity, especially by those who were children during the "dirty thirties". A few years ago, the Rev. Fritz Reuter of White, was secured to teach in our high school. What was White's loss was certainly our gain. The addition of this gifted family and happy home to our little town has meant much to the entire community. Mr. Reuter has enriched the lives of his pupils with his music, his manual training, and his high ideals. He teaches Sunday School, and is interested in all community projects.

Some years ago the Legion bought an old railroad coach with a kitchen addition, and moved it to town. It was brightened up with a coat of paint, and it has seen a great many meetings, suppers, pancake breakfasts, and other pleasant affairs. But of course the big event was the building of the large quonset type auditorium in 1949. The American Legion led in this project, but the entire community cooperated. It is a shining example of what can be achieved when people cooperate under good leadership. The building binds the community together and fills a real need. It has been a busy place. The Deuel County basketball tournament was held here in January, and there have been many other games, programs, and roller skating. Basket ball has always been a favorite sport here, and there are enthusiastic fans of all ages. The county tournament drew large crowds, and the games since then have also been very well attended. Henry Sand is the caretaker.

As we pause and look back over half a century, we perceive that many things that seem to matter at the time do not matter so much after a while. A few things do matter. In any town, large or small, it is easier to follow the trends of the time, than to act for the ultimate good of the greatest number. Visitors to the United States from foreign lands have remarked about the commercialization of every corner of our country. "When you've seen one small town, you've seen them all." As for Astoria, there

is one thing that makes it unique, at least in South Dakota. For the sake of the children and the young people growing up here, the people have sacrificed revenue that might have come into the treasury from the sale of liquor. The community has resisted great pressure and propaganda, especially the two or three years after Repeal.

We have been called puritanical—be that as it may, time has proven that we have gained by it in many ways. We believe that this sacrifice, in line with the attitude of the pioneers, has something to do with the good sense and standards of our young. A large proportion have sought higher education, and many have gone out as leaders among men. Astoria has sent out ministers, missionaries, teachers, social workers, doctors, nurses, engineers, aviators, newspapermen, and business men. Considering that the population is fewer than 250 we feel that the proportion is unusual. We do not wish to seem selfrighteous or smug—we are well aware of our shortcomings. With so many more opportunities than the pioneers had, we who live here should have pressed forward more quickly where they left off—especially in the realms of the mind. It is our duty to attain a wide view, and to help in the none too popular quest for truth in state and nation. We have been afflicted with pettiness, but we have also, many times, risen above it.

Sons and daughters who have come back to us today to renew old friendships, and to help us celebrate the fiftieth anniversary, we greet you and we thank you! May the name of Astoria continue to be glorified as you have glorified it. We are sorry that you will miss some dear friends who formerly were ready to make you welcome. We have had sorrow—great sorrow at times—it comes to all. We who remain will do well if we leave memories to linger about familiar places as these have done.

Fifty years have passed—a few of you here have seen them all. We thank the God of our fathers, and pray that their ideals will prevail in the future.

